

# Collaborating to Reduce Violence: The Impact of Focused Deterrence in Kansas City

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Andrew M. Fox<sup>1</sup> and  
Kenneth J. Novak<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

This research examines the impact of focused deterrence on homicide and gun violence in Kansas City, MO. In 2014, a coalition of police, prosecutors, city officials, researchers, and others implemented Kansas City No Violence Alliance, a focused deterrence violence reduction strategy. Using street-level intelligence and analysis, groups involved with violence were identified and notified of the consequences for future violent incidents. Leveraging existing social services, members opting for nonviolence were offered assistance. This study evaluates the impact on violence over 3 years of implementation. Using 2009–2016 police incident data on homicide (including group member involved homicide) and gun-involved aggravated assault, time series models were estimated to determine the effects of focused deterrence during 2014–2016. Analysis indicated that focused deterrence implementation resulted in an immediate reduction in homicides and gun-involved aggravated assaults. This effect began to diminish around the 12-month postintervention point. During the third year, overall and group member involved homicide numbers returned to preimplementation levels, and gun-involved aggravated assaults exceeded those levels. After achieving significant first-year reductions, despite robust implementation and fidelity, violence returned to preimplementation levels

<sup>1</sup>Department of Criminology, California State University, Fresno, CA, USA

<sup>2</sup>Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology, University of Missouri, Kansas City, MO, USA

## Corresponding Author:

Andrew M. Fox, Department of Criminology, California State University, 2576 E. San Ramon Ave, Fresno, CA 93740, USA.

Email: [anfox@csufresno.edu](mailto:anfox@csufresno.edu)

by the third year. Limitations to the focused deterrence model and the need for continuous evaluation and innovation are discussed.

**Keywords**

focused deterrence, gangs, homicide, gun violence

**Introduction**

Focused deterrence is an offender-based policing strategy that differs from earlier violence reduction strategies in that it does not attempt to transform serious offenders into model citizens or to clear them out of specific geographic areas. Rather, focused deterrence gives potential offenders reasons to cooperate in the effort to put an end to violence. Policy makers and practitioners use analytical and communication techniques, peer pressure, and stringent sanctions, along with social services and support for those committing to nonviolence, to motivate and enable nonviolent behavior. Essentially, focused deterrence strives to alter the norms and high-stakes behaviors of chronically violent criminals (Braga, Kennedy, Waring, & Piehl, 2001; Kennedy, 1996, 2012).

In 2012, a group of interested parties in Kansas City, MO, convened to research and attempt to address the city's chronically high rates of violent crime. The coalition ultimately determined that a focused deterrence strategy, similar to those that had succeeded in other cities, was a promising option. Other jurisdictions had found focused deterrence to be challenging to sustain, however, and so before proceeding, the coalition solicited long-range commitments from its members, and then set out to create a detailed framework designed to overcome problems encountered elsewhere. Two years later, early in 2014, the Kansas City No Violence Alliance launched its focused deterrence project, KC NoVA. The current study measures the impact of KC NoVA on rates of targeted violent crimes in Kansas City from 2014 through 2016.

***Focused Deterrence: A Violence Reduction Strategy***

Focused deterrence as a violence reduction strategy can be traced back to the Boston Gun Project (also known as Operation Ceasefire) of the mid-1990s. Borrowing extensively from problem-oriented policing techniques, a group of Boston stakeholders found that the city's serious youth homicide problem was, in fact, disproportionately concentrated in just a small number of groups (gangs) and attributable to relatively few habitually violent individuals associated with those groups (Kennedy, 2012). Boston Police, probation officers, street outreach workers, community leaders, and others collaborated to identify the most prolific offenders. In addition, applying focused deterrence principles, they notified